The TOWER

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Literary Magazine

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RED-NECK

Silent, he stands;
Eyes squinting across sun-blanched soil.
The sun-brown hand, gnarled, shading eyes,
Complements the back hunched from toil.
Faded, tattered blue overalls cling,
Perspiration-wet, to his thin frame.
He knows only hardship, failing crops,
Skies unfamiliar to rain.
Born poor, brother to the land,
Son too and father, he lies
Uneasy at night. In his rattle-dented truck, riding
Into town, someone thinks, "Red-neck!",
Unaware of tears that never drop,
Of the ever present, non-physical pain.

Frank R. Smith

NORTON'S BUSINESS

by

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Fatboy settled his heavy frame in the back seat of the car. For an instant he looked at the man next to him. He was hunched over, his rounded shoulders almost touching his lap. It gave him a headless appearance. For a brief second Fatboy had the mad desire to laugh at him. He stifled it when Al opened the door and climbed behind the wheel.

"D'ya find out where Mr. Norton wants us to go?" Fatboy snapped.

"Yeah." Al turned his head, not to look at Fatboy, but to back the car out of the underground garage.

Fatboy sat back in the seat. As long as Al knew where to go it was no concern for him to worry over.

Al handled the big car expertly. He swung it around the San Francisco curves almost as though the car itself was limber. Fatboy folded his hands and put them on his massive legs. He loved watching Al drive. There was a real beauty in it.

When he grew tired of watching Al manipulate the machine he looked again at the man next to him. He was still slumped over. Fatboy nudged him with his elbow.

"Hey, bud, you better sit up. You're gonna be sick sittin' like that."

Very slowly the man raised his head and looked about. First he viewed the back of Al's head, then his eyes took in the scenery flying past him. When his eyes came around to Fatboy, Fatboy gave him a wide grin. The man gave him one swift glance and turned back to the scenery.

"Go to hell," Fatboy mumbled and looked out his own window.

Al heard him and found the words immensely funny. He rared back his head and laughed.

"What the hell's so funny?"

"You telling him to go to hell. You going to help him on his way maybe?"

"That's none of your goddam business. Mr. Norton pays you to drive. So drive!"

Al made a sound and didn't talk anymore.

The three men drove along for a time without saying anything. When they crossed the bridge out of town Fatboy became so involved with looking at the sparkling water that he mumbled, "Like a bunch of beautiful diamonds." He quickly looked around at the man next to him.

"What the hell do you know about beauty, you fat pig?"

Fatboy swung his hand back but stopped before he hit the man's face. He'd get even all right. He turned back to his window.

The man detected the hurt on Fatboy's face and quickly recognized it as a possible chance.

"Hey man, I'm sorry."

Fatboy eagerly turned back around. "Sure, I guess I can understand. I thought for a while you was gonna take it all personal."

The man gave him an incredulous look but didn't say anything. Fatboy sensed he had said the wrong thing. He didn't want the man to stop talking. He tried again.

"Yeah, it's just a job. That's how I have to see it anyway."

"Really?" the man asked dryly.

"Yes, sir. Hell, all that crap you see in the movies, well, it's all bunk."

The man didn't answer.

"You got any kids, bud?" Fatboy still persisted in keeping the conversation.

This time the man's face hardened and the wild look he gave Fatboy almost frightened him.

"Shut your goddam mouth."

"What the hell's the matter? I just asked you a simple question!" Fatboy almost seemed to whine.

"I'm sure Mr. Norton could give you all kinds of information concerning my family," the man answered coldly.

Fatboy turned back to his window. Talking with the man was no pleasure. He wished he hadn't brought up the man's family. How in the hell was he to know when Mr. Norton involved one's family in these cases? He wasn't getting paid to worry with matters like that.

They were well out of the city and sped along the freeway in silence once more until Fatboy leaned forward and said to Al, "Christ I'm hungry. Next turn off let's stop somewhere."

"No, we can't do that. You want the bastard to get away?"

"I said next turn off let's stop somewhere," Fatboy said each word separately.

Al glanced at Fatboy in the rear view mirror but didn't say anything. His mouth was pressed into a thin straight line.

The next turn off Al turned and drove along the side road. They approached a small grocery store.

"This all right?"

"Yeah, Al. It'll do fine."

Al pulled the car up beside the store.

"You sure as hell better be careful, Fatboy, and watch him."

"You just get on in and let me worry about my concerns."

Al got out of the car and went into the store. Fatboy calmly looked straight ahead and almost appeared unaware of the man next to him. The man made a slight movement, raising his limp hand and putting it on the door handle. Afterwards, Fatboy was never completely sure the man's movement had even been intentional at all. It had been so slight, yet Fatboy swung his heavy hand into the man's face. His nose began to bleed in gushes that almost revolted Fatboy.

Al came out of the store and the first expression on his face was one of relief that the car was still occupied by two. When he'd climbed in and turned to give Fatboy the sack he saw the blood.

"Je-sus Christ! There's blood all over the damn car!"

"You're very perceptive, Al," Fatboy's jaws shook as he laughed. "Cm'on, let's get out of here."

Fatboy threw his handkerchief to the man and delved into the sack.

There were small tins of meat, a box of crackers

and a quart of milk. He ate with gusto, his relish of the food visible as well as audio. He did not look at the man next to him until he'd finished his meal.

The man's coat front was a crust of dried blood. He was very pale but held his head upright and stared at the back of Al's head.

Fatboy ran his tongue over his backteeth, he needed a toothpick but didn't have one. As he looked at the man he felt guilty for hitting him so hard.

"Hungry, bud?"

The man gave no appearance of hearing. Fatboy threw the remaining food to the front seat beside Al. They again drove along in silence which was broken by Al chewing on the crackers.

Some time later Fatboy saw a car pulled to the side of the freeway a distance ahead of them. A young woman was standing beside it.

"Pull over, Al."

"Like hell."

Goddamit, Al, I've about had it with you today. Now I said pull over!"

Al pulled the car over, quite a distance from the young woman's car.

"Are you crazy, Fatboy?" Al turned around in the seat as soon as the car stopped. "We can't take chances like this. Mr. Norton will . . ."

"Al, I am merely going to help the young woman in her distress."

Suddenly the man spoke up, "You pig! For Christ's sake leave her alone. Don't you have any decency in you?"

Fatboy looked at him blankly. He figured the hit must have affected his head. He climbed out of the car. The young woman had been glancing at them, unable to decide if they expected her to go over to them.

Fatboy amiably sauntered up to her. "What seems to be wrong, miss?"

She breathed a sigh of relief. He looked so kind and so jolly. "I feel like a complete idiot. It's only a flat tire but I can't seem to loosen the bolts."

Fatboy looked at the car. She had already jacked it and the hubcap was removed. "Well, let me see if I can do any good." Fatboy squatted down and proceeded to change the tire.

"It's really ironic. My husband has made me change hundreds of tires so I'd know how, he never figured on the bolts being too tight."

Fatboy laughed, "That's really a good one. Seriously though, you're lucky your husband cares enough to teach you." He had finished now and he stood up.

"Thank you so much. Will you let me pay you?"

"No, no. Any gentleman would have stopped. I'm glad I could help."

"Well, thanks again." She climbed into her car and drove off.

Al had the motor running as Fatboy climbed in and they started. The man stared at Fatboy and for the first time Fatboy realized why the man hadn't wanted him to help the woman.

"You was afraid I was gonna hurt her, weren't you?" Fatboy almost liked him for being concerned about the woman.

When they had driven for a while longer the man suddenly said, "I've got three kids. Two boys, Tracy and Kelly, they're seven and eight. Marcy, the baby, is only seven months."

Fatboy didn't answer, he only looked at the man. Al threw his head back and said, "We're just about there, Fatboy."

The man started talking fast now, desperately, "We sometimes take the kids to Disneyland. Man, they love it there."

"Shut up," Fatboy said. He didn't want the man to talk now. He didn't want to know anything about him.

"Once we stayed for a whole week. That was before my wife had Marcy. We . . ."

"Goddamnit, shut up!" Fatboy yelled.

Al was pulling the car into some woods off the freeway. It was shadowy and unbelievably quiet compared to the bustling freeway. Still the man continued talking, rushing through the words as if he couldn't say them fast enough. "My wife was almost like one of the kids herself . . ."

Fatboy swung his fist into the man's stomach. "You goddamn bastard, don't get nice, fight damn it, fight!" Fatboy shook the man with all his strength. But the man kept on about his family. Fatboy could hardly stand it, he pushed open the car door and drug the man out. The man still babbled about his wife and kids as Fatboy continued dragging him into the woods.

Al watched from the car until they were out of sight. He absently reached beside him for a cracker and nibbled on it. When he heard the two shots he threw the cracker out of the window and started the motor. Fatboy would be back in a few seconds.

Come, Navoo, sit close to the fire
The darkness may comfort, but leave the desire
Of living the memories, regaining thy birth
Of rejuvenation through Baptism by Earth.
But the Earth is turned acid and cleanses too well,
Erases the comfort of stability in hell.
Though the fire too, is stagnant, there's certain security,
A good place to die in unlimited obscurity.

Philip McEntee

THE MAGNOLIA

How suddenly like death
Your branches are to me—
How dark and dank your shadows . . .
How short and cold my breath.

And just before, two lovers
Kissed beneath these leaves
And felt the warmth of living
Beneath your fragrant covers.

But now, how evil act you,
How chill and thick your shade,
How slick and black your leaves—
All that brings to mind the yew.

The fragrance, just before,
Poured out sweet pungency;
But now how funereal
The sickening sweetness pours.

Ah, Magnolia, trickster!
You seduced your lovers here.
And your quiet heaving darkness
Will not ever let us stir.

Ah, for shame, you softly sighed
And made the night seem life-like
In your lure—then in midst
Of warmness, dying, came your lie.

Barbara Olson

A YOUNG GIRL'S DRY SPRING

One would not have thought
Of dirty motel bathroom floors
And burnt out soggy cigarettes
And toilet paper stuck to limp legs
And sweat and memory and cheap cologne.

One would not have done
To a crumpled red lace night gown
As a young boy spilling spent emotion
Into a dirty handkerchief
In a back road gas station latrine.

One would not have thought;
One would not have done.

For to think is masturbation;
To act is all screwed up;
To live is a back room call girl
That once could love.

Harvey Estes

AN OPEN LETTER CONCERNING THOSE THREE-NAME LADIES

Dear Sirs:
For some years I have been
Devoted to **Poet's** magazine;
Have riffled through your glossy pages
In search of Truth from well-paid sages
Bi-monthly. Now what woe is mine,
In thus perusing **Poet's,** to find
That lady poets of triple name
Are treated by you just the same
As real artistes! Dear God! How crass!
Don't you know they got no class?
How dare you print them in your pages?
How dare you pay them working wages
For rhymes of clouds and daffodils
And puppy-love and heating bills?
A Poet should write of what is Real,
Like "Forty Gassed in Automobile"
Or "Army Mishap in Mid-Air"
With blood and symbols everywhere!
And Truth! And lots of Imagism!
What the world needs now is Realism!
Obscure it, though, the darker the better—
How else can we keep the Man of Letters
At the front of the bus, from the common man?
If everyone who reads it can
Grasp what you mean, then try again!
After all, are you Rice or men?
Poems are for Scholars! Write them upside-down!
Type them crooked! Turn them around!
Most of all, to be a Poet Officially
Cut the first two names, Initially!
Like T.S. E....., or e.e. c.....,
Or—oh, well, you mean what I see;
I leave you on these thoughts to dwell,
Sincerely,

Miss s. k. farnell.

IT twas neerly pass daebrake hwen OTTO Schlepp(the wop)
wentu sleep that tnite * theee sing Ging ov Burds kauzed his
himheroids too throb witch gratelee dis tuRbed hem andhiz Armidillo#
know Ummount of medicashun helpt' his wretched GROWths expanded
with evry churp&
theiR wuz nuthingtudu Butteech hiz ARMORedillo to
clime TreEz ann THen neat the warbling birds.?]

AFTEr monks and munthz ov traininG hee TAWT hispet tu
Butt
climb trees to know anvail " !! || ? || four thee
lumberjack off knottingHam had cut the treees an the
warpling burdz had flone tu rode EYEland(%)

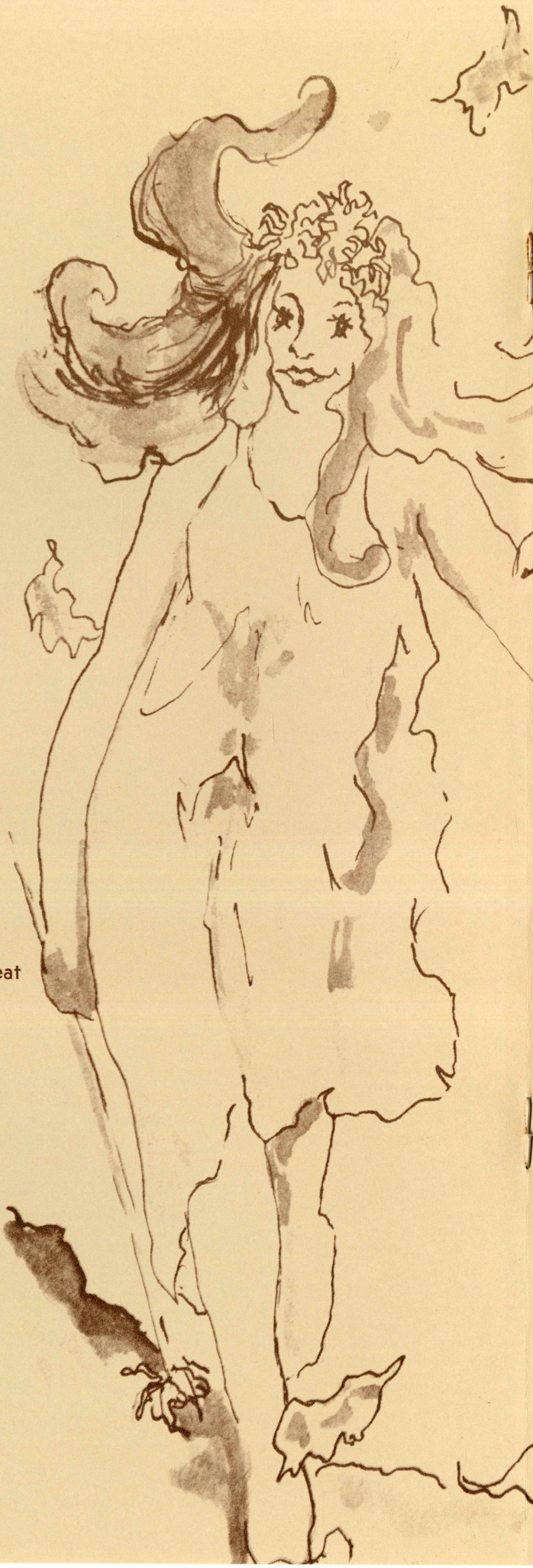
chuck YOakum
(SPECS)

The dry leaves were clacking together
On limbs nearly deserted in the twilight
Sounding like the cracked voices of old women
Muttering what a cold winter it will be.
In the garden the few scattered brown roses
Drooped in a stiff silence more ancient
For their cherub-faced youth, not so close
To winter's browning as country green.

I strolled among these frightened aged,
Hearing the cold wind's hollow echo
Of the traitorous song of summer now
In a minor key. I thought how my own skin
Would wrinkle and crack and then be lowered
Into the earth less gracefully than the fall
Of a leaf so sentenced. And then I saw
The moon rising.

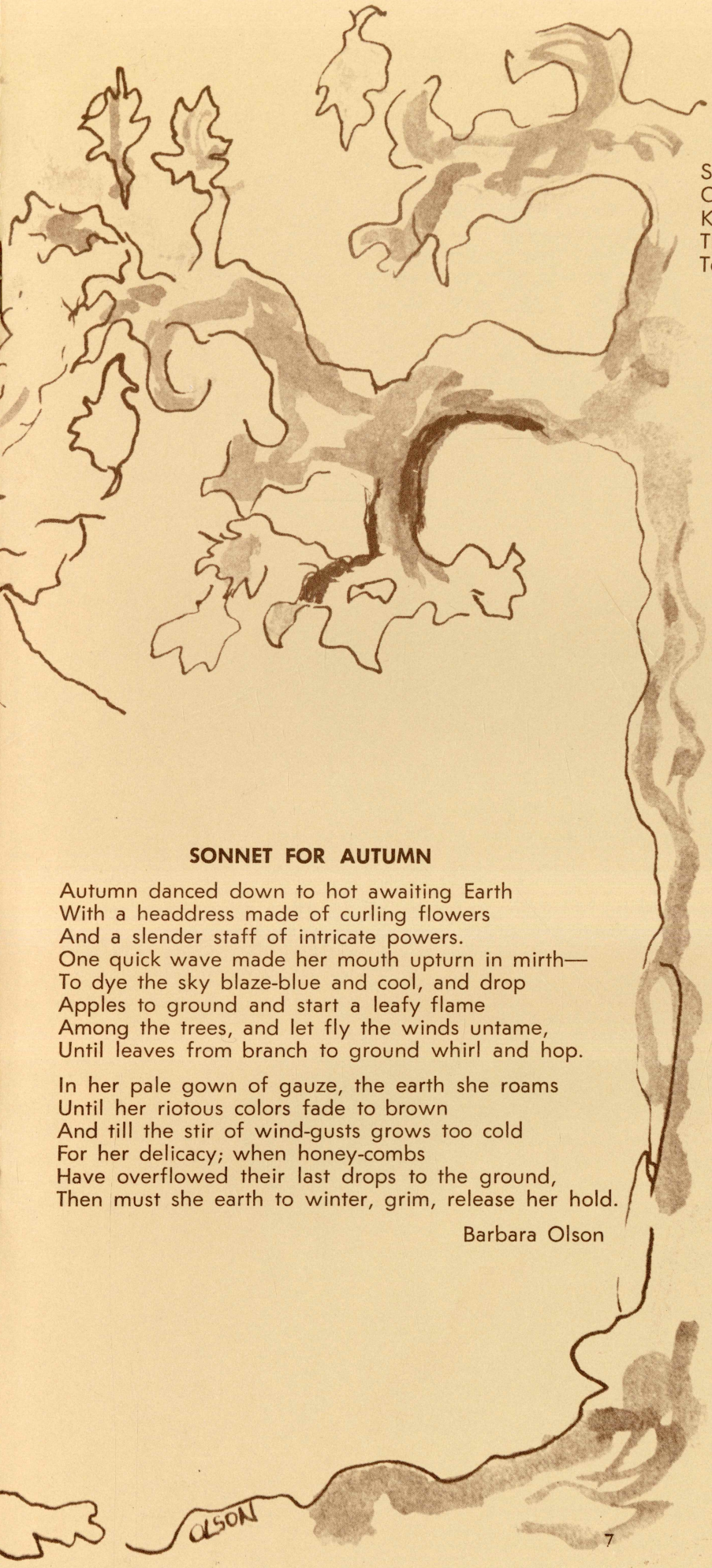
That blackened rotting winter corpses
Could be bathed in cool blue melted glass,
That smooth skin of moonlight could be underlaid
With jagged skeleton symbols of death
Made me smile: perhaps this decaying flesh
Is encased in the light of some distant promise
Unnoticed in a moment but evident through the night
Like the invisible moving of the moon.

Harvey Estes



Pine needles quiver as raindrops softly pat their gentle
green flesh.
They sway with each tender beat and recover quickly,
In time with the listing grasses beneath,
Keeping the rhythm of a wordless, soundless, perfect beat
A pattern of ceaseless ceremony.
Yet each points with independent gesture;
No angry fingers rise to rage toward
Solemn skies, content to be a sublime
Suggestion, where sweet water hangs like
Tender blue tears, haunting the shoulders
Of those limbs and slowly hesitatingly
Severing their icy grip from stark, but
Darkly graceful brown boughs
Leaving them liberated in rustic exile
Solitary in their nakedness.

Kathye Kerwan



Spring, pulsating as do waves of Springs,
Comes between the legs of dark, cool Winters,
Kindles the marriage-bed fire of Summer,
Then falls gentle, tired as the leaf falls
To sleep for a while beneath bedsheets of snow.

Harvey Estes

SONNET FOR AUTUMN

Autumn danced down to hot awaiting Earth
With a headdress made of curling flowers
And a slender staff of intricate powers.
One quick wave made her mouth upturn in mirth—
To dye the sky blaze-blue and cool, and drop
Apples to ground and start a leafy flame
Among the trees, and let fly the winds untame,
Until leaves from branch to ground whirl and hop.

In her pale gown of gauze, the earth she roams
Until her riotous colors fade to brown
And till the stir of wind-gusts grows too cold
For her delicacy; when honey-combs
Have overflowed their last drops to the ground,
Then must she earth to winter, grim, release her hold.

Barbara Olson

THE ISLAND PEOPLE

The island people know of dead men's bones;
They can trust no man so they trust in stones
And subscribe to relative infinity:
Rocks are gods if you're smaller than the sea
And you'll never see the waves wash the rocks away;
What are oceans to children on the sand that play?

They ride the sea waves in their balsa canoes
Til the sea throws them sprawling on the shore
And they run to say prayers to their gods of stone,
Try with whimpers to drown the ocean roar.

Harvey Estes

TO AMBROSE

Ambrose, my pet tadpole,
Sits in a gallon jar,
Better off than in the mudhole
Where I found him.
The mudhole was drying up
And Ambrose, in the mud-bottom,
Had not a chance.
So I lifted him up
And smiled to think

i am a savior

But only to a tadpole.
So Ambrose was saved
And imprisoned again
But could at least see
Through his walls of restraint.
Some folks thought it strange
That I, being twenty-one years old,
Should keep a tadpole pet.
I saw no need to question
My keeping a childhood dream.
Ambrose grew two legs
And so he was doomed like me.

Ambrose, out of water,
Hops upon dry land clumsily.
Seeing his fat repulsiveness
My foot on Ambrose goes 'squish'.
I smile to think

i am a savior and not only to a tadpole

Frank R. Smith

Sabbath-taggle glenned the Moon on Earth
Spread forth shining airs on our terrain
Pipers pouring spurting music through our vein
Echo silence, rolicking, lustful mirth.
Sudden grappled round I 'bout thy girth
Poised with passion, the tense before the strain
Then within thee deep I pour my gentle rain
Longing for our subtle love's rebirth.
You close around me hugging tight my flowing soul
Leading me deeper through your caves of warm
With your sweetness calling forth my golden swarm
Gathering my nectar in your golden bowl.
Sabbath-taggle glenned the Moon on Earth
Echo silence, rolicking, lustful mirth.

Philip McEntee

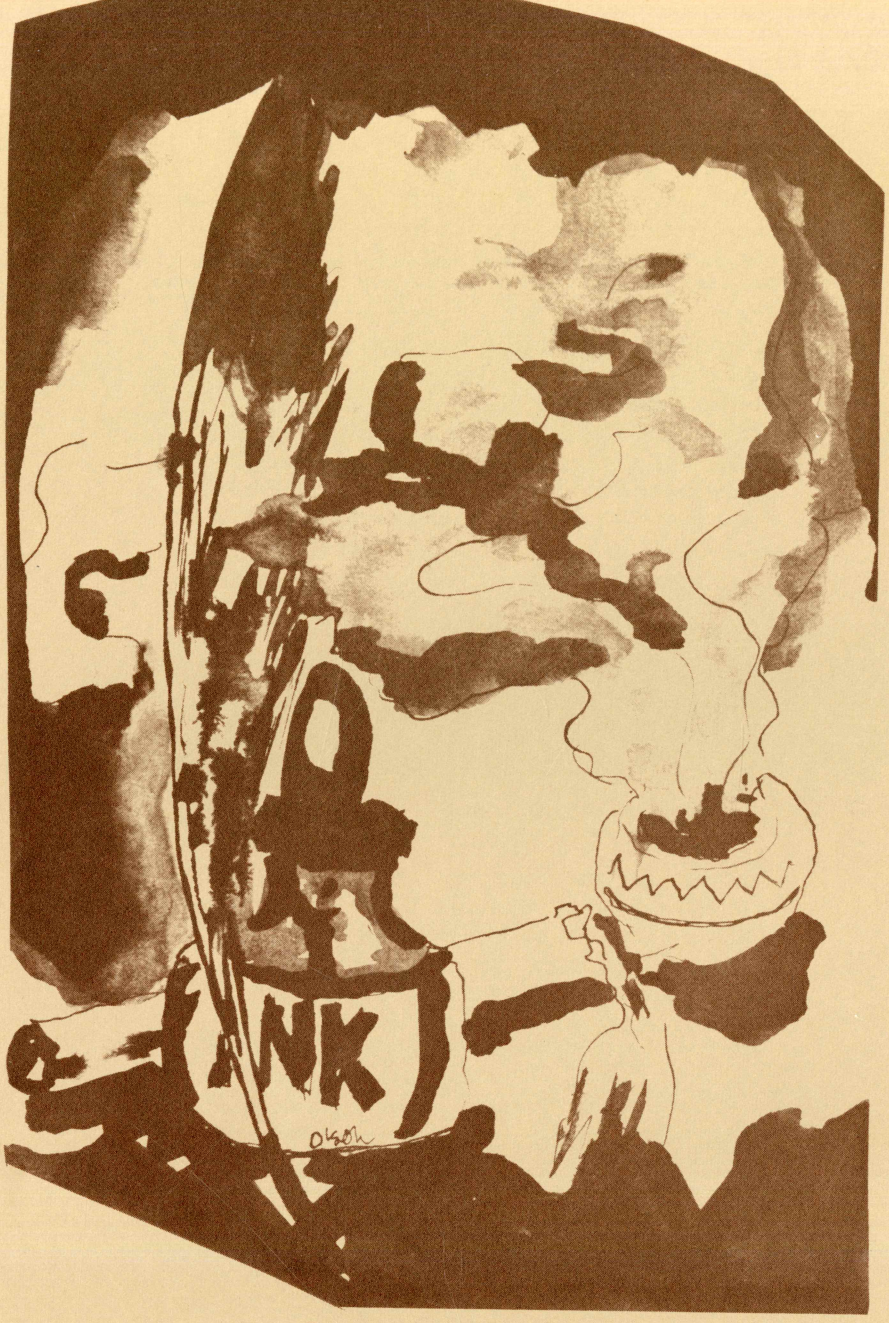
Because of you I see roses through my window,
White and red, first night blushing bride,
Thin, soft marriage bedsheet petals,
Sweet dream odor, sense losing sense—
But you are the glass and not the rose.

Harvey Estes

SONNET II

Oh why must we, through fate or chance, be far
Removed and locked immobile in our places?
Our hearts and minds together run, a double-star
In motion through the galaxie. Our faces
Ever turn to gaze into each other's eyes,
But soon not even an astronomer's glass will yield
This vision, for apart by too many skies
We'll wander, strange planets in a murky field.
Must we obey the whims of blind Até
God of Lovers; bettors, who on chance rely
Are we, twin gaming dice, to be cast away
To opposite poles, as our fates don't coincide.
Til reunited each other's thoughts we'll imitate
For a while our minds must hold our loved one's portrait.

Philip McEntee



GOVERNMENTAL INK

The governmental ink now cracked and dried
And words thought holy with a pilgrim's pride
Lay crumbled in the souls of tired bones
That shudder in the earth with silent groans.

Above the ancient pipe there curled blue smoke
To seal the honored words the agent spoke
Of friendships peace as long as grass shall grow,
And brotherhood as long as rivers flow.

But finding all the promises lies,
The silent tears streamed from the old men's eyes.
The tears rolled down a trail across the land
And filled a shallow creek of blood-stained sand.

The yellowed pages crumbled with long years
And other men found glory in their tears.
Let each man tell the story as he thinks;
But truth is lies in governmental ink.

Peggy Donaldson

ONCE IN SUMMER

A burgundy bubble
Swelled
And heaved
And floated
With airy triumph
Unnoticed on its purple throne
Among the breaths
Of a loyal inebrious cocktail crowd.
Then haply,
Some nameless fingers
Lifted the cellophane globe
And the bubble vanished
And
Like a hope
Is now
No more.

Fou Fou Zabaneh

A DREAM

There was once a dream.
In it there was a field,
A plain, stretching endless
And level, perfectly level,
Much farther than one could see.

On the plain were creatures,
Great numbers moving slowly,
Continuously in one direction.
When they tried to stray,
Huge mountains and bottomless gorges
Would come thrusting, crashing,
Smashing and bar their way.

When one would falter,
Another, from out of nowhere,
Would take his place.
They multiplied and continued
On and on and on
Into a horizon stretching
Wider and wider.

They were creatures of habit.
They lived,
They fought,
They loved,
They attacked the mountains,
They tried to span the gorges,
They failed and died,
They were reborn,
They unceasingly moved on and on,
And
they dreamed . . .

But then the Dreamer awoke
And the creatures, the dreamers,
Were swept away
As a fine powder is blown from a table top
By the slight outlet of one's breath.

And the Dreamers,
The inhabitants of the DREAM,
Can only hope that the sleep of the DREAMERS
Is endless . . .

Frank R. Smith

I want to go back to . . .
What was it?
Before things got old and stale.
Magic love
and
Romantic drippings
give to me a dream
of Life
Better than the rest.
They don't know
What goes on
inside
The Crystal Heart of a raindrop
or
in the soul of an old
oak
tree.

So now we have it.
But what have we at all.
A shining sun shining on people
never
smiling

Gail Creel

DESOLATION

and the silence crackles and smoulders
with anger that cannot blaze
but is condemned to a destiny
of futile eternal endeavoring
always on the brink of flaming
but always confined by some
hated inherent soddenness
that refuses to evaporate

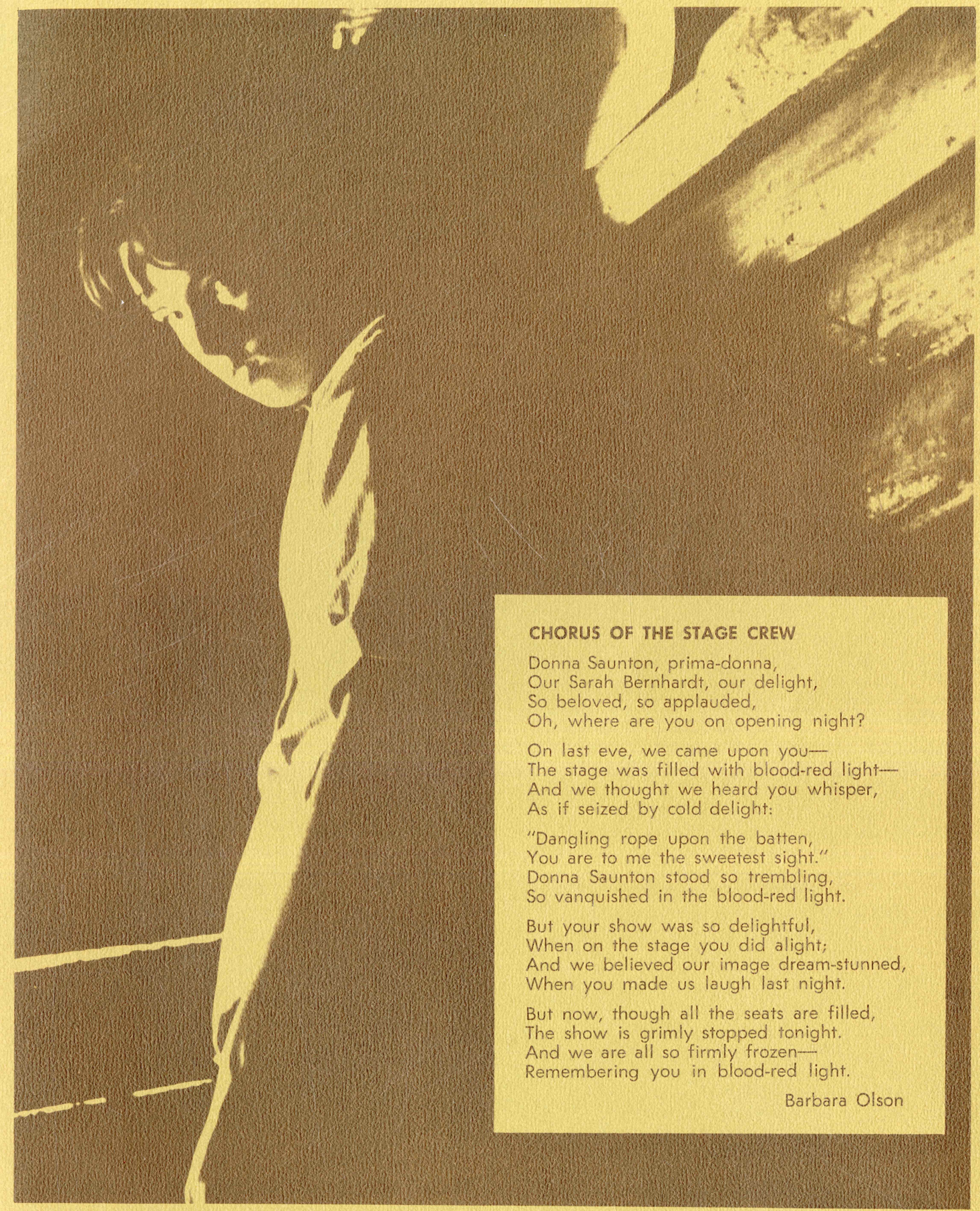
and there is always the perpetual yearning
and trying to remember and recapture
seeking some candle in the vagueness
something burning
something living
and once it might stand up somewhere
but the wick cannot ignite
and the question: is *this*
the flame that has drowned
in the residue of what it has burned?

and the silence quivers
its stale breath stifled for a moment
by an elusive doubt
fostered by an evasive question's
tingling of the grain
but the gasping cry never emerges
from the depths of its desperation
for it could not be nurtured
in that empty confused abyss
that had once contained "soul"

and the silence experiences nothing
but the feeble pathos of the pathetic

and the sound of one's own breathing
only complements its desolation

Elizabeth Hill



CHORUS OF THE STAGE CREW

Donna Saunton, prima-donna,
Our Sarah Bernhardt, our delight,
So beloved, so applauded,
Oh, where are you on opening night?

On last eve, we came upon you—
The stage was filled with blood-red light—
And we thought we heard you whisper,
As if seized by cold delight:

"Dangling rope upon the batten,
You are to me the sweetest sight."
Donna Saunton stood so trembling,
So vanquished in the blood-red light.

But your show was so delightful,
When on the stage you did alight;
And we believed our image dream-stunned,
When you made us laugh last night.

But now, though all the seats are filled,
The show is grimly stopped tonight.
And we are all so firmly frozen—
Remembering you in blood-red light.

Barbara Olson

T 7.1-3